WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A method for facilitating selection of at least one shipping carrier using a network-based system including a server and at least one device connected to the server via a network, said method comprising the steps of:

receiving shipping information from a user via the device;

5   comparing the received shipping information against pre-stored information;

selecting at least one shipping carrier which matches the received shipping information; and

displaying the selected shipping carrier based on the shipping
10   information.

2.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of receiving shipping information comprises the step of receiving at least one of a package type, a place of origin, a destination, a Latest delivery date, a Latest time, and a Weight of the package.

15   3.   A method according to Claim 2 wherein said step of selecting at least one shipping carrier comprises the steps of:

retrieving an optimum shipping carrier and associated costs; and

downloading the optimum shipping carrier and associated costs.

4.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying
20   the selected shipping carrier based on the shipping information further comprises the steps of:

displaying at least one of a carrier, a rate, a shipping method and delivery times details of the optimum method; and

displaying at least one other alternative carrier including a name of the
25   alternative carrier, a rate of the alternative carrier, a shipping method and delivery times details of the alternative carrier.

5.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of receiving shipping information data from a user further comprises the step of receiving a user identification and a password for authentication purposes.

6.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying further comprises the steps of:
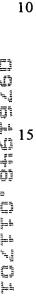
accessing a website of the shipping carrier; and

generating a shipping label on at least one of an attached printer and a network printer.

7.   A method according to Claim 1 wherein the shipping information is received from the user via a graphical user interface.

8.   A method according to Claim 1 further comprising the step of validating compatibility based on the received shipping information to determine whether a resulting optimum method is capable of meeting key parameters defined by a user.

9.   A method according to Claim 8 further comprising the step of guiding the user to the optimum shipping method.

10.   A method for selecting at least one shipping carrier using a network-based system including a server coupled to a centralized database and at least one device connected to the server via a network, said method comprising the steps of:

authenticating a user based on a pre-defined criteria; and

launching at least one of a shipping wizard to select an optimum shipping method and a maintenance wizard to maintain the centralized database.

11.   A method according to Claim 10 wherein said step of authenticating further comprises an additional authentication procedure to the user before providing an access to the maintenance wizard.

12.   The method according to Claim 10 wherein the device and the server are connected via a network and wherein the network is one of a wide area network, a local area network, an intranet and the Internet.

13. A method for facilitating selection of at least one shipping carrier using a network-based system including a server coupled to a centralized database and at least one device connected to the server via a network, said method comprising the steps of:

5   accessing a maintenance user interface after a user has been authenticated based on pre-defined criteria; and

providing capabilities to the user to maintain the centralized database.

14. A method according to Claim 13 wherein said step of providing capabilities further comprises the steps of providing at least one of a functionality that permits the user to register a new carrier, modify an existing carrier, add locations, edit locations, add departments, edit department profiles, add users, and edit user profiles.

15. A method according to Claim 14 wherein said step of providing capabilities further comprises the steps of downloading and displaying various performance metrics.

16. A web-based shipping system for facilitating selection of at least one shipping carrier, said system comprising:

a client sub-system comprising a browser;

a centralized database for storing carrier information;

20   a server sub-system configured to be coupled to said client sub-system and said database, said server sub-system further configured to:

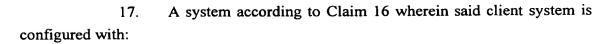receive shipping information from a user via the client system;

compare the received shipping information against pre-stored information;

25   select at least one shipping carrier which matches the received shipping information; and

display the selected shipping carrier based on the shipping information.

17.   A system according to Claim 16 wherein said client system is configured with:

a displaying component for displaying at least one of a home page user interface, an input interface, a user interface displaying an optimum shipping method, a user interface displaying alternative options, a user interface displaying the user's final selection, and a user interface that facilitates printing of a label;

a displaying component for displaying at least one of a user interface to access maintenance home page, register a new carrier, modify an existing carrier, add locations, edit locations, add departments, edit department profiles, add users, and edit user profiles, and

a sending component for sending an inquiry to the server system so that the server system can process and download the requested information to the client system.

18.   A system according to Claim 17 wherein the sending component functions in response to a click of a mouse button.

19.   A system according to Claim 17 wherein the sending component functions in response to a voice command.

20.   A system according to Claim 17 wherein said system is further configured to be protected from access by unauthorized individuals.

21.   A system according to Claim 17 wherein said server system is further configured with:

a collection component for collecting information from users into the centralized database;

a tracking component for tracking information on an on-going basis;

a displaying component for displaying at least one of a home page user interface, an input interface, a user interface displaying an optimum shipping method, a user interface displaying alternative options, a user interface displaying the user's final selection, and a user interface that facilitates printing of a label;

a displaying component for displaying at least one of a user interface to access maintenance home page, register a new carrier, modify an existing carrier, add locations, edit locations, add departments, edit department profiles, add users, and edit user profiles;

5 a receiving component for receiving an inquiry from the client system; and

an accessing component for accessing the centralized database and causing the retrieved information to be displayed on the client system.

22. A system according to Claim 21 wherein said server system
10 further configured with a receiving component for receiving an inquiry to provide information from one of a plurality of users.

23. A system according to Claim 21 wherein said server system further configured with a processing component for searching and processing received inquiries against the data storage device containing a variety of information collected
15 by the collection component.

24. A system according to Claim 21 wherein said server system further configured with a retrieving component to retrieve information from the database.

25. A system according to Claim 21 wherein said server system further configured with an information fulfillment component that downloads the
20 requested information after retrieving from the database to the plurality of users in the order in which the requests were received by the receiving component.

26. A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server system further configured to:

25 receive at least one of a package type, a place of origin, a destination, a latest delivery date, a latest time, and a weight of the package;

update the carrier information including at least one of a carrier, modify an existing carrier, add locations of the carrier, edit locations of the carrier, add departments, edit department profiles, add users, and edit user profiles; and

30 store updated carrier information in the database.

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27. A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server system further configured to enter information at least through one of a voice activation command and a device connected to the client system.

28. A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server system further configured to store the updated carrier information against an identifier.

29. A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server system further configured to:

track the carrier information on a real time basis; and

store the carrier information on a real time basis by updating stored information by adding the new information to the centralized database on a real time basis to provide up-to-date carrier information instantaneously to the user upon a request.

30. A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server system further configured to:

download requested information from a server system; and

display requested information on a client system in response to the inquiry.

31. A system according to Claim 30 wherein said server system further configured to print the requested information in a pre-determined format.

32. A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server system further configured to accept an inquiry from a user.

33. A system according to Claim 32 wherein said server system further configured to:

receive an inquiry from the client system; and

display information on the client system.

34. A system according to Claim 33 wherein said server system further configured to submit a request through at least one of pull down menus, check boxes, and hypertext links.

35.   A system according to Claim 33 wherein said server system further configured to display an HTML document downloaded by the server system.

36.   A system according to Claim 33 wherein said server system further configured to display at least one alternative from various alternatives available to the user.

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37.   A system according to Claim 30 wherein said server system further configured to:

access the centralized database;

search the database regarding the specific inquiry;

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retrieve information from the database; and

transmit the retrieved information to the client system for display by the client system.

38.   A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server system further configured to accept a request for maintenance home page after the user has been authenticated against pre-determined criteria.

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39.   A system according to Claim 16 wherein said client system configured to be a server for a network of customer devices.

40.   A system according to claim 16 wherein said network is one of a wide area network, a local area network an intranet and the Internet.